

Ahwatukee Foothills

Weekend News

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Over budget: Land, construction raise Loop 202 costs

By Doug Murphy
Staff Writer

With a price tag double what planners estimated just a few years ago, the South Mountain Loop 202 might have priced itself out of existence.

Estimates by the Arizona Department of Transportation released late yesterday show that the freeway will cost between \$1.7 and \$2.4 billion, depending on the route, when construction and most right-of-way costs are combined.

When voters approved Proposition 400 in 2002 to fund transportation projects for the next 20 years, it was estimated that \$1.1 billion would be enough to build the 20 to 25 miles of the Loop 202 from Interstate 10 in Ahwatukee Foothills, through South Mountain Park and reconnecting with I-10 between 55th Avenue and the Loop 101/I-10 interchange.

"At this point these are just estimates," said ADOT spokesman Matt Burdick.

But he also said that between 2003 and now, costs for construction and real estate have increased significantly.

In Ahwatukee Foothills alone the cost to buy 255 homes and several commercial buildings and build 10 miles of the freeway is now estimated at \$800 million, up from the \$523 million estimated in 2003.

And that figure is expected to increase because it does not include inflation or the cost of relocating underground water and sewer lines and other utilities.

Depending on the route, the cost of the Loop 202 could be more than half of the \$3.67 billion that the Maricopa Association of Government has budgeted for the following projects: construction of the Loop 202, the 38-mile Loop 303 from I-17 to US 60 to I-10, and the 23-mile I-10 reliever. That reliever would be built south of the existing freeway with between two and six lanes from the Laveen area to S.R. 85 in the far West Valley.

Because of rising construction and real estate expenses, freeway construction costs have rocketed in the last few years.

For comparison, the 22-mile Agua Fria Loop 202 from I-17 to I-10 cost just \$681 million for 22 miles in 2000. The Pima Freeway, Loop 101 from I-17

through Scottsdale and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community to the Loop 202, cost \$1.3 billion for 28 miles in 2002.

The South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team received the construction and right-of-way reports last night and planned to discuss them.

The advisory team was formed by ADOT to help make recommendations on possible routes for the freeway that was originally planned in 1988, but was put on hold in 1991 because of a lack of money.

On the west side of the project there are three possible routes to connect with I-10. On the eastern, Ahwatukee Foothills side of the project, the only route at the moment is at Pecos Road. ADOT has been trying to work with the Gila River Indian Community to discuss possible routes south of Pecos Road on Indian land.

For more information, or to read the construction and right of way reports, visit www.southmountain-freeway.com.

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